

Ank Bishop

Interview with Ank Bishop

—Ruby Pickens Tartt, Livingston, Alabama

GABR'EL BLOW SOF'! GABR'EL BLOW LOUD!

When "Gabr'el take his silver trump," he is going to blow soft for the saved and loud for the lost souls, according to Ank Bishop who was born into slavery eighty-nine years ago, and lives in Livingston, Alabama. The days before the war were as good as the present, Ank believes. He tells of them in the following story of his life:

"My name is Ank Bishop, en I was born in 1849, August 16th, at Ward, Alabama. My mother's name was Amy Larken, an' my father was Tom Bishop. I had three brothers, Alf, Volen an' Jim, an' two sisters, Cely an' Matildy. Us belonged to Lady Liza Larkin at Ward, right nigh Coke's Chapel.

"My mother was brought out from South Car'lina in a speculator drove, an' Lady Liza bought her at de auction at Coke's Chapel. She lef' her mammy an' daddy back dere in South Car'lina an' never did see 'em no more in dis life. She was bidden off an' Lady Liza got her, jes' her one from all her family. She was got fer Lady Liza's house gal. But sometimes she cooked or was de washer, den ag'in de milker. 'Twas my job for to min' de ca'ves. Sometimes I went to Mr. Ed Western's sto' at Gaston, three miles from us house, to see iffen was any mail for Lady Liza, but 'twa'n't none.

"Dey was good to us 'caze Lady Liza's son, Mr. Willie Larkin, was de overseer for his ma, but co'se sometime dey git among 'em an' thrashed 'em out. One time one de niggers runned away, old Caesar Townsy, an' dey sarnt for Dick Peters to come an' bring his "nigger dogs." Dem dogs was trained to ketch a nigger same as rabbit dogs is trained to ketch a rabbit. So Mr. Willie Larkin told Stuart for to say to old man Dick Peters when he come, 'I'm gone,' but for him to come on. 'I'm gwineter keep de road,' he say, 'an' cross 'Bigbee at Moscow landin'.' So ol' Dick Peters, he kept de road lack he tole him to, an' he cross 'Bigbee at Moscow landin' over in de cane-brake. But dem nigger dogs didn't never ketch ol' man Caesar. He stayed right wharever he was at 'twell after S'render, an' de War done ceased. Den he come out, but iffen he had a been caught, dey'd a used him up pretty rough, but he stayed hid twell de time done passed.

"All de women on Lady Liza's place had to go to de fiel' ev'y day an' dem what had suckerlin' babies would come in 'bout nine o'clock in de mawnin' an' when de bell ring at twelve an' suckerlin' 'em. One woman tended to all of 'em in one house. Her name was Ellie Larkin, an' dey call her 'Mammy Larkin.' She all time sarnt me down in de fiel' for to git 'em come suckle de chillen, 'caze dat made hit hard on her when dey gets hongry an' cry.

"Us didn't get to go to church none, an' us wa'n't larnt nothin'. I'm nigh 'bout ninety an' I can't read a line. I got some chillun kin read; one can't whut is sixty-five, but Henry he fifteen an' he kin. De ma, she go by de name of Pearlie Beasley, she can't read neither, but she's a good fiel' han' an' she patched dese breeches I'm wearin' an' dis ole shirt. Miss, I ain't got a coat to my name. Can't go to church, so I doan' know dat dis any better'n slav'y time. Hit's hard, anyway you got to travel, got yo' nose on de groun' rock all de time. When pay day come, ain't nothin' pay wid. Come git de rent, den you out do's ag'in. Bred an' bawn in Sumter County, wore out in Sumter County, 'specks to die in Sumter County, an' whut is I got? Ain't got nothin', ain't got nothin', ain't got nothin'.

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"But I'm a believer, an' dis here voodoo an' hoodoo an' sper'ts ain't nothin' but a lot of folk's outten Christ. Ha'nts ain't nothin' but somebody died outten Christ an' his sper't ain't at res', jes' in a wand'rin' condition in de world.

"Dis is de evil sper't what de Bible tells about when hit say a person has got two sper'ts, a good one an' a evil one. De good sper't goes to a place of happiness an' rest, an' you doan' see hit no mo', but de evil sper't ain't got no place to go. Hit's dwellin' place done tore down when de body died, an' hit's jes' a wand'rin' an' a waitin' for Gabr'el to blow his trump, den de worl' gwineter come to an en'. But when God say, 'Take down de silver mouf trump an' blow, Gabr'el,' an' Gabr'el say, 'Lord, how loud shell I blow?' Den de Lord say, 'Blow easy, Gabr'el, en ca'm, not to 'larm my lilies.' De secon' time Gabr'el say, 'How loud mus' I blow, Lord?' Den de Lord say, 'Blow hit as loud as seben claps of thunder all added into one echo, so as to wake up dem damnable sper'ts sleepin' in de grave-ya'ds what ain't never made no peace wid dey God, jes' alayin' dere in dey sins.'

"But de Christ'en Army, hit gits up wid de fus' trump, an' dem what is deaf is de evil ones what anybody kin see anytime. I ain't skeered of 'em, though. I passes 'em an' goes right on plowin', but iffen you wants 'em to git outten your way, all you gotter do is jes' turn your head least bit an' look back. Dey gone jes' lack dat! When my fus' wife died 'bout thirty years ago, I was goin' up to Gaston to see Sara Drayden, ole Scot Drayden's wife, an' I tuck out through Kennedy bottom 'bout sundown right after a rain. I seed sompin acomin' down de road 'bout dat high, 'bout size a little black shaggy dog, an' I says, 'What's dat I sees commin' down de road? Ain't nobody 'roun' here got no black shaggy dog? Hit kep' a-comin' an' kep' a-gittin' bigger an' bigger an' closer an' closer, an' time hit got right to me 'twas as big as

a ha'f growed yearlin', black as a crow. It had four feet an' drop years, jes' lack a dog, but 'twa'n't no dog, I knows dat. Den he shy out in de bushes, an' he come right back in de road, an' hit went on de way I was comin' from, so I went on de way hit was comin' from. I ain't never seed dat thing no mo'. But I'ze gotter pretty good notion 'bout who hit 'twas.